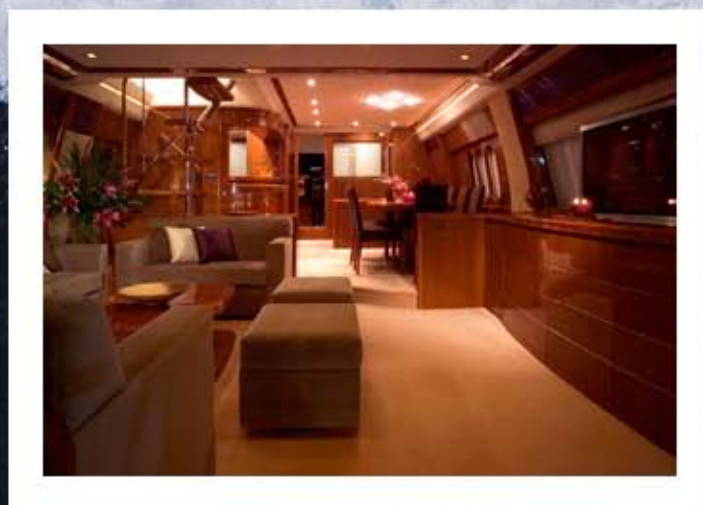


The lap of *luxury*

Water, water everywhere – and it's full of South Africans being turned on to the boating lifestyle

Words Dave Mullany

Photographs courtesy Boating World and The Last Word





Opposite The *Princess Emma* chartered power cruiser in Cape Town is operated by the Last Word group of 'intimate' hotels. Above left to right The Fairline Targa 58 Gran Turismo, available from Boating World.

We all like to dream. Win the Lotto, drive an Aston Martin, own a sea-facing penthouse in Clifton, or spend the rest of our lives travelling the world on permanent vacation.

For many people, such fantasies often focus on the notion of a lazy, idyllic life aboard a boat – not on some hard-graft, ocean-going, keelhaul-the-mizzenmast racing yacht, but aboard one of those super-luxury cruisers you see bobbing at anchor in the Caribbean, Monte Carlo, the French Riviera and, indeed, right here at Cape Town's V & A Waterfront or the Durban Yacht Mole.

Not long ago, I strolled around Monte Carlo's yacht basin to gawk at the water chariots of the extremely rich and famous. One of the vessels there was the 126m mega-yacht, *Octopus*, property of Microsoft co-founder, Paul Allen. The boat is an occasional visitor to South African waters and sports two helicopters and even two mini submarines. It's a sobering vessel: the wood panelling on her poop deck probably cost four times the price of your house – even if you do live in Clifton.

Back here in South Africa, boats are a tad more modest, but, at the top end, still very much in the luxury class. Even so, a growing number of South Africans obviously agree with old Ratty of *The Wind in the Willows* fame that 'there's absolutely nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats', and are going sailing in larger numbers than ever before. This may sound odd in the middle of a recession, but experienced yachting, Hazel Holtzhausen, says that while SA's boating fraternity is small compared with those overseas, the numbers of casual day and weekend sailors are growing: 'The lifestyle attracts people with a zest for the outdoors and adventure, but it also caters for your day sailor who simply enjoys the serenity of the ocean. We're also blessed with fabulous weather, which makes sailing an all-year opportunity.'

Hazel has 10 years of sailing experience and handles reservations at Durban's Offshore Sailing Academy, founded 33 years ago (under another name) by yachting legends, Chris and Libby Bonnet. Chris is gone now, but his feisty wife maintains the academy's ground-breaking traditions (the Bonnets introduced

sail training to South Africa), which have seen more than 30 000 South Africans turned from landlubbers into fully qualified sailors and skippers.

Derrick Levy owns Durban's Boating World. The company is a well-respected dealership with offices in Durban and Cape Town and specialises in luxury motor yachts from British manufacturer Fairline and Australia's Riviera.

Derrick paints an evocative picture of the boating life: 'Getting up on a glorious sunny morning to the lapping of the water against the hull is what life is all about on a motor yacht. For some, it's the sizzle of freshly caught crayfish cooking in wine; for others, it's the scream of the marlin reel out on the deep-sea fishing zone.' Derrick learned his trade as a youngster growing up beside the Vaal River, where his father ran a boatel for local leisure craft. The good news for Gauteng's land-locked mariners is that there's plenty of current boating activity on the Vaal, one of the few South African rivers suitable for pleasuring boating. Many of those who own properties on the riverbanks have their own craft, while local outfits offer a variety of river cruises.

So, what's not to like about the lifestyle? Well, cyclones, tsunamis, Somali pirates and submerged containers, for starters. But, hey, if that bothers you, do what a lot of local sailors do: stick close to land and enjoy the experience without any of the deep-sea dangers. Derrick says the key to sailing success is for buyers to get a vessel that's right for their needs. 'Cape Town buyers tend to invest in luxury cruising motor yachts so that they can enjoy the beautiful Cape coast. Sports fishing yachts, such as the company's Riviera boats, are popular for tuna fishing and catching crayfish. They're also popular in Durban and Richard's Bay, where owners relish the thrill of deep-sea fishing. Cruising to the beautiful Mozambique island archipelago at Bazaruto has also become popular.'

If you're keen to get out on the water but your money is locked up in property or stock market dealings, then you may want to join a syndicate and share the costs. Derrick says, 'South Africa has a good number of vessels owned by syndicates. The process puts more people on board boats. For example, a 12m yacht with 10 owners works out at about R500 000 each. Step up to a 20m luxury brand and you're looking at around



Above left and inset The Riviera Flybridge Enclosed 53 IPS at anchor; hardwood floors multiply the feeling of luxury. Above right and inset The Fairline Squadron 58 makes waves; the Squadron 58's roomy interiors.

R2,5 million each. With running and maintenance costs split 10 ways, it suddenly becomes a more viable option, and as larger vessels include a skipper, all you have to do is walk on board, have fun and then walk off.

Does a motor yacht make a good investment? Derrick says, 'Boats can be an investment, as they don't devalue at the rate of, say, a motor car. International brand names are linked to offshore currencies, so they can increase in value. Also, boat ownership means you can entertain clients and perhaps charter the vessel to recoup costs. But never forget the sheer personal enjoyment aspect.'

Hazel takes a slightly different, um, tack: 'You're investing in a lifestyle. Your vessel is an asset that will enhance your life. But if you're looking at pure asset-based return, I can only repeat what Chris Bonnet used to say: "Invest in containers, not yachts!"'

South Africa has a well-respected boat-building industry and is renowned for its sail- or motor-powered catamarans. The average local cat is about 15m and has the advantage of spaciousness and extra accommodation. Last year, R2,5 billion in locally built boats was exported from the Western Cape alone.

Meanwhile, in spite of great tracts of unsuitable coastline, marina development in South Africa is growing apace. Apart from the obvious Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London yacht havens, there are also excellent marinas at Knysna, Richard's Bay, St Francis Bay and Port Alfred, and inland at Hartbeespoort Dam. There's also the possibility that the on-off-on, hotly contested, small-craft harbour planned for Durban's Point Waterfront might actually be built some time this century. Another story ...

As for interior decor and equipment on modern motor yachts, the sky is the limit. Derrick says, 'You can have a top-of-the-range sound system, DVD, TV with DSTV, fully equipped galleys with ice-maker,

coffee machine, fridges and freezers. Luxury finishes are more or less standard: plush carpets, teak flooring and granite tops.'

Mooring costs vary according to location and size of the vessel. At the V & A Waterfront, berths cost around R6 000/month, while Durban asks a mere R1 500/month.

If you don't want the hassles of berthing, maintaining and provisioning your own vessel, then there's always the charter option - popular with corporate groups or even a group of friends planning some celebratory blowout.

One of the most desirable vessels in this regard is the V & A-based *Nautilus*, a 35m yacht with six cabins, a Jacuzzi on deck and cocktail and champagne bars. She can take 58 people out to sea and can host 110 guests when she's tied up.

Nautilus Media Manager Mandi Jarman says the recession has had little effect on business: 'We're busy hosting a mostly corporate market for sunset charters and cocktail evenings. Especially popular are the crayfish barbecue and champagne cruise to Clifton. *Nautilus* is clearly a class act - international guests have included US rapper MC Hammer and singer Kylie Minogue.' Interested? A three-hour cruise for up to 25 people costs R20 000, or R800/head.

Another charter option in the Cape is V & A habitué, *Princess Emma*, operated by the Last Word hospitality group. She is a 25m luxury cruiser that offers Monte Carlo-style opulence and al fresco dining for up to eight guests. Daily rates include all meals and an overnight stay in one of her four en-suite cabins.

There are, of course, dozens of charter options in all of our port cities, from five-star, push-out-the-boat sunset spectaculars to raucous, knees-up Mother Saria Marais booze cruises for the nine-to-five set. The choice is yours ... ☺

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